

The Church, A Giver Group

Smyrna vs Laodicea

Eph. 5:1-2 ¹ Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. ² And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

The Church in Laodicea had money.

The Church in Smyrna had mercy.

God banks what passes THROUGH you; not what piles up with you. Smyrna's poverty was heaven's prosperity for them. Acts 17:25 does not cancel Matt. 25:40 – it explains it.

Acts 17:25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

Matt. 25:40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

God does not need your bread. Your neighbour does, and your neighbour is created in His image (Gen. 1:27).

Gen. 1:27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

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The Church has a role model in God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ. God's desire is that we are like Him in heaven. According to Matt. 5:48, we are God's dream children (those of us who have believed in Him through Jesus Christ). Although there are many characters in Scripture who obeyed God in their ages, the perfect model God has recommended that we imitate is Himself and His Son, Jesus Christ (see Heb. 12:2).

Divine providence has given us the terrestrial world and all of the resources therein for our corporeal well-being (Acts 17:24-25), and Jesus as a sacrifice for the salvation of our soul after this life (John 3.16-17).

Such giving is not compelled by law but by love and given to meet need, not to keep law. The kind of Giver our Father in heaven is leaves much for us, His children, to learn here on earth, as we live daily to reveal Him, an invisible Person.

Fellowship with God, like fellowship with others, involves 'giving and receiving'. Under the old covenant, giving to God was direct, through sacrifices and offerings at the temple. Today, we give to God materially by giving to His people and

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His work (Matt. 25:40). In return, God supplies our material needs through His providence and gives us spiritual blessings directly in Christ (Eph. 1:3). The Bible says that God cannot be served by human hands in Acts 17:25, and we are reminded that serving God (giving to Him) can only be done indirectly (Matt. 25:31-46, 1 John 3:17-19, 4:20-21). Jesus and / or the Father can be hungry and could be fed by us, naked and could be clothed by us, strangers and could be hosted by us, when we give those services to anybody God made in His image who lacks them, out of love for Him.

When God stipulated sacrifices in the Law of Moses, all were not burnt offerings. They were also intended to be agents of the revelation of God's mercy to mankind (Matt. 12:1-7). To be able to be a giver group, we must be prosperous, making a surplus from our work, without engaging in profiteering. If we engage in profiteering in order to give, we are using God's resources to destroy God's supreme property – mankind. No one is successful in the sight of God if his business impacts negatively on fellow beings. This is how we know that King Solomon was not truly prosperous because, to be rich as

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he was, he heavily taxed his countrymen (profiteering) and conscripted them into forced labour. We can be sure of this when we read in 1 Ki. 12:1-20 what transpired after his death, at the beginning of the reign of his son, Rehoboam. The dividing of the kingdom was judgment from God, because Solomon did not keep His covenant (1 Ki. 11:11).

As already stated, looking up to Jesus as our giver model, one discovers that we are rich, not because of what is in our custody as owners, but what has been passed by God through us to others in need. The Church in Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-9) knew that God does not accept or reject offerings based on quantity and quality but on intent. It is so because even unbelievers can give the same service without a reward from God. When the world system's yardstick was used to value them, they were a suffering and a poor people. But Jesus's value of them in heaven was otherwise: In God's treasure house above, Jesus saw their riches and said that they were rich. This is not unconnected with what we have established already, that even though we may have little worldly prosperity, in the lives of those God has helped through us, what wealth we

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have used to help others, whether spiritual or physical, is still counted for us for our rewards. Even if not physically seen with us because we have given it away, it is still counted for us in heaven's storehouse.

This is contrary to what we see among the group of believers in Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-17). These were a people who saw themselves as prosperous and lacking nothing, whereas Jesus saw them as ignorant folks who never realized that they were wretched, miserable, naked, blind and poor. There is a lesson herein that believers in Christ never likely look for helpers around as they are aware that they are more blessed when they give than when they receive (Acts 20:35). Instead, they look for those to help (the helpless) with what they have – either with the word spiritually or with alms physically. They also go to God in prayer as victors and not beggarly, which expresses fear, not faith. In which category are you? If the Lord is speaking to you now, do not harden your heart. He stands at the door and knocks.

Evaluation Questions & Answers

1. It is more blessed for God to give THROUGH you than TO you. True or False? Why?
 - * True. “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35)
“You will be enriched in every way to be generous.” (2 Cor. 9:11)
 - * Why? Receiving ends with you. Giving through you reveals God. “Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least... you did it to Me.”
 - * God’s model: He Gave His Son (John 3:16). Christ gave Himself (Eph. 5:2).
 - * We are pipes, not ponds. If God gives TO you and stops, you are Laodicea. If God gives THROUGH you, you are Smyrna.
 - * Blessed = conduit.

2. In this world we will not be counted as the richest because we use any opportunity we have to do good. See Rev. 2:8-9 and Luke 3:11. True or False?
 - * True. “I know your... poverty – but you are rich.” (Rev. 2:9)
“He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none.” (Luke 3:11)

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- * Why? The world measures by custody “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease...” (Luke 12:19-21). Heaven measures by distribution, “rich in good works... storing up treasure.” (1 Tim. 6:18-19)
- * If you do good at every opportunity, your bank account stays low. The world says ‘poor’, but Jesus says ‘rich’. Choose His valuation.

3. a) What is the difference between ‘making profit’ and ‘profiteering’?

Profit: Honourable gain from business investment – “her merchandise is good” (Prov. 31:18). “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.” (2 Thess. 3:10)

Meets need, pays fair wages (Jam. 5:4).

Goal: Stewardship with generosity.

- * Profiteering: Exploitative gain that destroys God’s supreme property – mankind.
Solomon example (1 Ki. 12:4): “Your father made our yoke heavy.” Forced labour, heavy tax is profiteering.
“You have heaped up treasure... by fraud.” (Jam. 5:1-6)
- * Test: Does my business make people or break people? Profit builds, profiteering kills.
“He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker.” (Prov. 14:31)

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b) Who is a racketeer?

- * One who makes money by dishonest business, exploitation, or creating a monopoly on necessities. Racketeering is using God's resources to destroy God's image. Church racketeers are Laodiceans (Rev. 3:17).
- * Biblical:
 - Money changers - "house of merchandise" (John 2:14-16).
 - Those who profaned the Sabbath (Neh. 13:15-18).
 - Ananias and Sapphira: "kept back part" (Acts 5:1-3).
- * Modern:
 - Inflating prices in famine.
 - Charging usury to the poor (Ex. 22:25).
 - Selling "anointing oil" for breakthrough (Neh. 13:15-18).
- * God's verdict:
 - "I will never forget any of their works." (Amos 8:7)
 - "The end has come upon My people Israel; I will not pass by them anymore." (Amos 8:2)
- * Repentance vs Judgment: For those who repent, there is mercy. For those who persist in using God's name or resources to exploit

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His people, there is judgment (Rev. 3:16, Amos 8:10).

- * Christ invites repentance: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock... If anyone opens, I will come in.” (Rev. 3:20)

4. What does Jesus teach us when, for forty days hungry, he would not use His power to produce food for Himself but did so when people who listened to His preaching were hungry for a few days (Matt. 14:13-21)?

- * Lesson 1: Miracles are for ministry, not self. He would not turn stones into bread for Himself (Matt. 4:3-4), but multiplied bread for others (Matt. 14:19).
- * Why? Love does not serve self (Phil. 2:4-7).
- * If He feeds Himself, Satan wins (Matt. 4:3), if He feeds others, the Father is glorified (Matt. 15:36).
- * Lesson 2: Divine power meets others’ needs, not our greed. A hungry crowd is an opportunity to reveal the Father (John 6:11). A hungry Christ is an opportunity to trust the Father (Matt. 4:4).
- * Lesson 3: True prosperity = what passes through you. Five loaves + two fish became 12 baskets (Matt. 14:20). He kept nothing. Gave all. Still full.

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- * Smyrna principle: Empty hands, full heaven.
“...In a great trial of affliction ... their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.” (2 Cor. 8:2)
- * Test: Do you use anointing to pay your rent or to feed His sheep (John 21:17)?

Prayer

Dear Father, teach me to know that You desire that we become rich but not through oppressing the poor – profiteering; that doing so will surely return us to poverty like the Church in Laodicea.

Lord, we pray for every reader. When we are lukewarm make us hot. When we are blind, give us sight. Amen.